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AIR UNIVERSITY

DEVELOPING AIR FORCE OPERATIONAL PLANNERS  
FOR  
ENHANCED AIR-TO-GROUND INTEGRATION

by

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## **Biography**

Lt Col Jeffrey Marker graduated from the University of Idaho in 1987 with a degree in Mechanical Engineering and attended Air Force Officer Training School in 1988. Following commissioning, he attended Specialized Undergraduate Navigator Training at Mather Air Force Base. He has operational flying experience in EF-111A, F-4G and F-15E aircraft as well as having served on the Air Combat Command staff. Lt Col Marker commanded the 366th Operations Support Squadron at Mountain Home Air Force Base and subsequently attended Air War College.

## **Introduction**

The United States military is unquestionably the most dominant fighting force in the world today and the Air Force is a critical aspect of that power. Our adversaries recognize these facts and are shifting the nature of war away from force-on-force conflict, turning instead to more asymmetric forms of conflict. To adjust, the United States Army is pushing planning and execution authority to lower echelons, and the Air Force should follow suit. Reviews of counterinsurgency actions in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom highlight the opportunity for increased flexibility when supporting ground forces and show how the Air Force should develop airpower expertise and planning capability to align with Army organizations. To make this change, the Air Force should develop airpower experts and modular, scalable planning teams capable of operational-level planning across the full spectrum of Air Force capabilities, and integrate those experts into Army divisions, brigades and battalions to maximize joint air, ground and space effectiveness. To demonstrate these points, this paper describes the current integration structure and builds upon lessons learned reports and analysis of current operations to propose this new planning construct aimed to improve the integration of joint air, ground and space capabilities.

Since World War II, Air Corps and Air Force leaders have fought to develop the most effective use of airpower in combat operations. Those leaders recognized airpower's unique ability to operate across an entire theater while simultaneously creating effects at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of war. As Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1 states, "The U.S. Air Force provides the Nation a unique capability to project national influence anywhere in the world on very short notice. Air and space forces, through their inherent speed, range, and

flexibility, can respond to national requirements by delivering precise military power to create effects where and when needed.”<sup>1</sup>

To maximize airpower’s impact for the nation’s cause, the Air Force advocated and developed operations based on centralized control and decentralized execution. While ground forces traditionally operate in well-defined areas of operations (AOs), the Air Force operates not only across all AOs simultaneous but also throughout the theater and even across theaters. However, air and space power is also a limited resource. As such, history shows a single commander with extensive airpower knowledge and a theater-wide perspective can most effectively prioritize, plan and execute airpower missions based on the theater commander’s guidance. Again referring to AFDD 1 regarding centralized control, “Because of air and space power’s unique potential to directly affect the strategic and operational levels of war, it must be controlled by a single airman who maintains the broad, strategic perspective necessary to balance and prioritize the use of a powerful, highly desired yet limited force.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, AFDD 1 describes decentralized execution as “the delegation of execution authority to responsible and capable lower level commanders to achieve effective span of control and to foster disciplined initiative, situational responsiveness, and tactical flexibility.”<sup>3</sup> Doctrinally these definitions provide baseline concepts for employing air and space power, but these concepts also require a command and control structure for planning and execution.

To integrate air and space power into joint planning and warfighting execution the Air Force developed the Theater Air Control System (TACS) command and control (C2) infrastructure. AFDD 2 states the TACS “consists of airborne and ground elements to conduct tailored C2 of air and space operations throughout the spectrum of conflict, including air defense, airspace control, and coordination of space mission support not resident within theater.”<sup>4</sup> The

document goes on to describe how airborne systems within this command and control mechanism include the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), the Joint Surveillance, Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) and forward air controllers (airborne) (FAC-As).<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the TACS contains ground elements to provide direct coordination and communication mechanisms with ground maneuver organizations. This ground system includes tactical air control parties ranging from the battalion to corps level. Additionally, the corps level includes the Air Support Operations Center (ASOC), which coordinates directly with the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) to provide the overall link between ground forces and air command and control. The Air Force's CAOC and associated TACS provides the foundation for joint force integration of air and space assets, but current operations show the Air Force can further improve integration efforts with Army units. It is important to note that since the Marine Corps has its own effective command and control structure based on its combined arms team employment methods, the focus here is on improving Air Force-Army integration.

### **Current Integration Structure**

The Air Force maintains its theater-wide focus, centralized control and ultimate flexibility through the CAOC. Air Force doctrine describes the CAOC "as the operations command center of the JFACC [joint forces air component commander], it provides the capability to plan, task, execute, monitor, and assess the activities of assigned or attached forces."<sup>6</sup> To facilitate this ability, the CAOC comprises five functions including strategy development, combat planning, combat operations, air mobility, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR).<sup>7</sup> Capabilities range from theater-wide strategy development to creating and executing air tasking orders (ATOs) to retasking airborne assets within minutes for high value emerging threats or targets. An additional and vital element in the CAOC is the Battlefield Coordination



Detachment (BCD). This Army detachment, permanently assigned to the CAOC, is an integral link between the Air Force's TACS and the Army's coordination mechanism, the Army Air-Ground System (AAGS). The BCD is the Army's direct link for processing preplanned CAS missions and air interdiction target nominations. They are essentially the Army component commander's representation with the air component and ensure air planners understand ground component priorities and intentions.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, the Air Force maintains liaison functions with higher-level Army organizations.

The Air Force's Air Component Coordination Element (ACCE) is an as-needed liaison element within the other component commanders' staffs, but has a different function than the BCD. The ACCE does not process requests like the BCD, but rather provides the other component commanders with insight into how to best employ airpower and the JFACC's intentions. In addition, the ACCE provides information to the JFACC and CAOC on the other component's requirements and intentions. In other words, the ACCE provides two-way communications, but typically at the joint force and component command levels and not at lower echelons.<sup>9</sup> Again, the Air Force will establish an ACCE on an "as-needed" basis unlike other elements of the TACS.

Within the TACS, the Air Force's primary control agency for land operations is the ASOC. The Air Force derives this from the air support operations group (ASOG) with the ASOG commander typically dual-hatted as the ASOC director.<sup>10</sup> Doctrinally, the ASOC's "primary mission is to control air operations short of the FSCL [fire support coordination line]. Normally collocated with the senior Army fires element, the ASOC coordinates and directs air support for land forces at corps level and below."<sup>11</sup> Doctrine also states, "Integration then continues down through the air component liaisons aligned with land combat forces and

ultimately provides terminal targeting and control. Terminal attack control of CAS assets is the final step in the TACS for CAS execution.”<sup>12</sup> Based on the terms “terminal targeting and control” doctrine implies the ASOC exists for CAS execution. However, AFDD 2-1.3 does allow that “the ASOC also provides rapid response to requests for air support and is capable of assisting time-sensitive targeting and friendly force location information to CAS, AI [air interdiction], SEAD [suppression of enemy air defenses], air mobility, and ISR missions.”<sup>13</sup> This is the point Air Force doctrinal and real integration weaknesses appear. Although the request, coordination and control aspects of CAS currently work well, analysis of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan will show detailed operational planning with Army units for specific operations is limited resulting in less than optimum air and space power integration.

The ASOC is typically located at corps level while air liaison officers (ALOs) and tactical air control parties (TACPs) integrate at corps, division, and brigade levels to round out the TACS. Doctrinally, the Air Force aligns the ALO with land maneuver units to provide air and space power expertise. As AFDD 2-1.3 describes, ALOs are rated officers who “must be involved in the supported land commander’s military decision-making process so they can perform detailed air support planning with their own staff.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the TACPs are designated liaisons to ground maneuver units to provide guidance on air and space power as well as provide terminal attack control for CAS. Conceptually the structure provides the necessary resources for CAS execution, but recent lessons learned from both Air Force and Army reviews show the ALO and TACP liaison functions are strictly CAS oriented and do not have the expertise nor resources to provide guidance or planning capability for the full spectrum of air and space power.

## **Lessons Learned**

The Air Force developed its command and control processes based on traditional force-on-force warfare, but today's global war on terrorism drives the service to expand concepts of operations. Arguably, with the United States' overwhelming military power, few adversaries are willing to face this nation in traditional conventional warfare. As the global war on terrorism demonstrates, we will certainly face adversaries who will choose to fight in asymmetric ways, such as insurgency operations. This is not to say we must discard traditional warfighting concepts but rather expand those concepts to encompass a broader spectrum of conflicts. The Air Force is making such efforts with its expanded doctrine into irregular warfare (IW) contending "IW is not a lesser included form of traditional warfare. Rather, IW encompasses a spectrum of warfare where the nature and characteristics are significantly different from traditional war."<sup>15</sup> This same document acknowledges the inherent command and control problem with irregular warfare, and more specifically, counterinsurgency operations (COIN) by stating, "The current TACS organization is optimized for a theater-level traditional warfare with the AOC as the senior C2 element and focal point for all Air Force operations. During COIN operations, the preponderance of planning and integration of other Services occurs at lower distributed echelons."<sup>16</sup> This statement acknowledges a disconnect between Air Force operational level centralized planning and tactical level planning in the other services.

This planning disconnect is a major concern in irregular warfare and is receiving Air Force attention at the highest levels. A recent study by the Air Force Lessons Learned Office articulates, "Integration of Airpower in Operational Level Planning' is one of three L2 [lessons learned] focus areas directed by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CSAF) at CORONA Top 2007."<sup>17</sup> The report goes further by observing the differing decentralized and centralized

planning processes between services is inhibiting airpower integration into joint mission planning and execution.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the report states, “The ground component planning process is ‘bottom up’ while air component planning is ‘top down’. The different planning processes create an organizational void in operational level planning integration.”<sup>19</sup> The Army’s AAGS “bottom up” planning in IW and COIN entails decentralized planning and resource allocation at the company and battalion level. In contrast, the Air Force designed TACS planning for major combat operations with centralized planning and resource allocation at the JFACC/CAOC level. Additionally, the Air Force’s habitual relationships with Army organizations do not extend below the division and the associated ALO position; however, it is below this level where the majority of planning occurs. Further, Airmen assigned to support these lower echelon forces are not adequately trained in the full spectrum of air and space power capabilities. According to the USAF/A9 report, this creates a 36-48 hour time gap between the start of planning for an operation and when the Air Force is actually notified of an operation.<sup>20</sup> To complicate the issue further, the Air Force develops liaisons for CAS, electronic warfare, space, and ISR but fully integrated and timely planning for those resources and their operational level capabilities is limited.

This integration with IW and COIN operations also changes the level of required planning. Maj Gen William Rew points out in his “Operational Flexibility” briefing that during traditional major combat operations the JFACC, through the JFC, apportions and allocates a vast majority of airpower resources to the traditional mission areas of air interdiction, offensive counter-air, defensive counter-air, and strategic attack. However, as operations transition to irregular warfare, the majority of effort must also shift to missions such as CAS, ISR, armed overwatch and armed reconnaissance. Inherent in this transition is a shift from JFACC assigned

missions with traditional supported and supporting relationships to airpower providing a direct support role for another component.<sup>21</sup> In addition, he contends operations lie on a continuum of traditional major conflict and IW and as the level of IW operations increase, the planning effort becomes less centralized.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, positioning properly trained Airmen at lower echelons would provide inputs and reachback to the CAOC allowing for more effective use of airpower.<sup>23</sup>

Arguably, the Air Force already has assets available to conduct such planning and integration. Like the AF/A9 Lessons Learned report, Lt Col Keith Teister, writing in the Air Land Sea Bulletin, contends the Air Force must further develop integrated planning across the full spectrum of airpower capabilities and ALOs can fill that function. He argues:

“The Air Force needs qualified officers able to address all capabilities the air component can contribute in full-spectrum conflict. These Airmen must have broad operational campaign planning expertise, not just how to plan and package air assets. They need holistic, multi-spectrum, campaign and operational planning skills capable of linking strategic goals/end states to tactical actions.”<sup>24</sup>

Although ALOs are ideally situated to provide full spectrum airpower planning there are several issues in practice. First, as stated in the AF/A9 report, they are not habitually located with ground units below division level limiting their ability to train and plan with units with which they operate. Additionally, most ALOs do not have the rank required to easily integrate with those ground units. As Teister points out, “Rank commensurate with the aligned sister service command structure is required to facilitate communications.”<sup>25</sup> He goes on to explain sister services are rank conscious and without a certain level of rank, Air Force officers are unable to attend or participate in appropriate meetings or planning sessions. The Air Force is beginning to recognize this fact in Operation Iraqi Freedom where the service increased the Multi-National Force-Iraq ACCE's rank to a two-star position. According to an AF/A9 lessons learned report, “Previous and current ACCE directors voiced varying degrees of frustration with their access,

authority, and level of responsibility. Early OIF [Operation Iraqi Freedom] ACCE directors were not normally invited to the MNF-I [Multi-national Force-Iraq] Commander's key planning sessions and Battlefield Update Assessments (BUA). MNF-I staff leadership spent little time with the ACCE. Generally, the ground component is more rank-sensitive than the air component. Increasing the ACCE director rank from O-7 to O-8 has allowed the ACCE to participate in high level planning meetings and battle assessment updates that were previously closed to him."<sup>26</sup> A similar argument exists for lower level Air Force liaisons. Although rank, training and manning are issues, they are not insurmountable.

### **Recommendations**

The Air Force has made great strides developing tactical level flexibility through the TACS and must continue to modify organizational and planning focus to address asymmetric warfare. From airpower's beginning with Brig Gen Billy Mitchell through World War II with Generals Hap Arnold and Carl Spaatz, Air Corps and Air Force leaders fought to focus airpower on targets having strategic and operational level impact. This is where airpower traditionally provided the greatest effect. This trend continued through Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm, Allied Force and to a certain extent Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, as the world's only superpower our adversaries are employing more dispersed and asymmetric methods. For this reason, it is vital for the Air Force to modify employment strategies, in particular with COIN and IW operations, pushing planning and execution to lower echelons. Based on Corona discussions highlighted earlier, it is apparent such thought processes are continuing to build. With those efforts, the Air Force should now focus on developing resources for improved ground force integration.

To improve air-to-ground integration, the Air Force should imbed teams with planning expertise across the air and space power spectrum of operations, within appropriate Army organizations. As described earlier, ground forces are conducting current COIN operations with the majority of planning occurring at the company and battalion level. Obviously, COIN operations will not always be the situation; therefore, we should develop a flexible structure, which the JFACC can modify as the nature of the conflict changes. The foundation for such a structure begins with establishing a planner position within Army battalions and above. The planner is an individual with knowledge of both Air Force and Army planning processes and a foundation in the vast array of capabilities presented by airpower to include CAS, interdiction, ISR, electronic warfare, air mobility, space, armed reconnaissance, armed overwatch, time sensitive targeting and other dynamic targeting capabilities. This core individual, or operational planner, should have a permanent position on the Army commander's planning staff, be rated by that commander, and receive joint credit for the assignment. This individual should train, plan, deploy and execute as an integral member of that Army organization. Ultimately, such an individual fills two critical roles. The first is to educate Army leadership at every level on air and space power capabilities to enhance those leaders' knowledge of options and resources available for operations. The second role is to provide planning expertise and a conduit to the CAOC and JFACC for two-way communications on both air and ground operations and intentions.

Operation Anaconda provides an example of how this core operational planner could contribute to the joint fight. The 10th Mountain Division deployed to Afghanistan with a specific security mission. Andres and Hukill, in their *Joint Forces Quarterly* article, point out how for various reasons division leadership decided to leave attached Air Force assets behind.

Unfortunately, their mission orders changed in theater requiring the 10th Mountain Division to lead coalition combat action in the Shahi-Kot Valley. Ultimately, Air Force assets in theater were not aware of the operation until very late in the planning process leading to incomplete planning, poor coordination between assets and a failure to fully integrate air and space power into the operation.<sup>27</sup> An operational planner on the 10th Mountain Division staff would have known about the mission at the initial planning stages and been able to provide feedback to Air Force leadership on the impending operation. More importantly, the planner could have provided invaluable expertise to division, brigade and battalion commanders throughout the planning process. For example, early reconnaissance in the valley with ISR assets would have provided Army leadership with a better understanding of enemy disposition and numbers, which was vastly underestimated.<sup>28</sup> Conceivably this could have changed coalition force employment. Additionally, an operational planner could have coordinated preparation of the battlefield to set the stage for ground force execution.<sup>29</sup> Again, this may have changed coalition force employment and likely reduced enemy force numbers and capabilities. Most important, an operational planner could have coordinated an airspace control structure facilitating better CAS, ISR, artillery and special operations aircraft communications and employment. Arguably, this capability is in the ALO's realm, but not in reality.

Although doctrinally the ALO should be able to provide the operational level planning described, in practice, the Air Force does not provide these officers with the full gamut of operational knowledge. A recent graduate from the Air Force's Air Liaison Officer Qualification Course described solid training with a foundation in Army operations and CAS coordination, but a curriculum far short of that required to plan and coordinate the full spectrum of air and space power capabilities.<sup>30</sup> He also highlighted how his training does not include detailed education in



the Army military decision-making process further limiting the ALO's capabilities. The operational planner concept can correct these shortfalls.

To fully develop the operational planner concept the Air Force has several options. The first is to assign intermediate developmental education (IDE) in-residence graduates straight from school into operational planner positions. This includes, and may need to be limited to, Air Command and Staff College graduates, Army Command and General Staff College graduates and potentially the School of Advanced Airpower Space Studies graduates. These schools' curriculums include joint planning and joint air planning courses to enhance graduates' understanding of airpower and integration into joint operations. Additionally, providing these planners joint officer credit will increase the attractiveness of these vital warfighting positions. Unfortunately, staffing all required positions in Army organizations would draw a high percentage of IDE graduates, which would reduce their influence throughout the joint force and may not be in the military's best interest.

A second option is to design a training program similar to IDE schools but focusing specifically on Air Force and Army capabilities. This option is essentially a more robust Air Liaison Officer Qualification Course with graduates receiving more in-depth education on air and space power missions, Air Force planning processes, Army employment doctrine, and the Army's military decision-making process. Executing this enhanced training option requires resources for additional instructors at the existing school, upgrading facilities and modifying training systems. An unfortunate pitfall is that rated officers filling the operational planner positions would require significantly increased amounts of training, drawing them away from flying assignments for longer periods. With basic, intermediate and senior developmental

education, formal flying training and the potential operational planner training, officers would spend even more time in educational forum and away from line operations.

A third concept is to design a specific officer career field for airpower operational planners. This option requires a philosophical change by the institutional Air Force. Career operational planners would typically start their careers at battalion levels and move to higher echelons as their careers progress. More interestingly, by developing these planners as young lieutenants along an operational planner career path implies they would not typically be rated. The Marine Corps established this precedent with their Marine Air Command and Control system with the vast majority of manpower being non-rated specialists. This option provides individuals solely dedicated to operational planning, but comes with several pitfalls. First, without being rated, these individuals would have limited exposure to the flying employment demands and limitations. Additionally, a career operational planner would spend very little time in Air Force assignments and potentially lose sight of the Air Force's broader operational requirements.

The final and recommended option is a combination of all three options. This option, admittedly idealistic, provides a variety of educational and experiential backgrounds to integrate with Army units. Additionally, the Air Force gains ground force integration expertise across a broader spectrum of officers while simultaneously reducing manpower requirements in specific career fields. As these operational planners, from differing career fields and backgrounds, reintegrate into the Air Force following Army assignments, they will bring a greater understanding of joint operations. As such, these planners should all receive joint officer credit for their efforts. The challenge with the combine approach is ensuring all planners have the

necessary training background, despite coming from differing programs. Although training and education is a major consideration, rank is also a factor.

As highlighted earlier, operational planners integrated into Army organizations should have rank commensurate with the command structure they support. Ideally, Army divisions have a colonel assigned, brigades a lieutenant colonel and battalions should have major or possibly a seasoned captain. During larger scale conflicts, such as Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, rank at the corps level presents an additional challenge. For effective coordination, this is optimally a brigadier general. Obviously, the Air Force cannot place a one-star in every Army corps on a permanent basis. The most likely solution is to keep the current ASOG concept for daily operations and add an appropriate brigadier general for large force training and operations. As discussed earlier, much of the current planning in today's operations occurs at the company level. The best option is to keep the Joint Terminal Air Controllers (JTACS) with the companies and allow seasoned non-commissioned officers to facilitate planning. Those JTACS would continue to maintain a close working relationship with the battalion-level planner for operational planning requirements. Again, the Air Force should assign these JTACs and operational planners described above, but they may not be enough.

Operational planners provide the core air-to-ground liaison structure, but they may require more specialized support. Larger scale contingencies or specialized operations will require support beyond what a single operational planner can provide to different organizations. As such, the Air Force should develop modular, scalable teams capable of deploying, planning and executing with the operational planner. Conceptually, each operational planner would be able to team with specialists from specific mission areas to enable more detailed planning. The mission areas should include, but not be limited to, space, electronic warfare, ISR, air mobility

and SEAD. Manpower for these positions then becomes an issue. Arguably, as operations shift from conventional conflict to IW or COIN operations, the demand on CAOC manpower diminishes. Therefore, the commander air force forces (COMAFFOR) and JFACC can draw expertise directly from CAOC staffing and deploy those individuals to specific operational planning teams.<sup>31</sup> Operation Iraqi Freedom again provides a solid example. Current operations show minor friction areas between the Army and Air Force regarding ISR and air mobility. ISR is in such high demand that poor coordination occasionally leads to wasteful duplication of effort. For example, lack of coordination drives Air Force ISR assets to perform reconnaissance along specific road segments while Army assets may work the same areas with a slightly different focus. An ISR specialist imbedded with an operational planner and providing detailed planning support and recommendations could greatly increase operational efficiency freeing more ISR capability to more organizations. Similarly, for large-scale humanitarian relief operations, airlift is a vital resource. Providing expertise within the controlling agency, assuming it is not Air Force, would give operational leadership valuable and timely planning guidance. In both the Operation Iraqi Freedom and humanitarian relief examples there is an additional benefit to the specialist, and that is feedback to Air Force functional areas. Specialists could coordinate directly with CAOC functional areas and potentially outside agencies. In the airlift case, USTRANSCOM maintains operational control of many assets creating an additional coordination link. The specialist would work this additional link while the operational planner continued supporting the Army organization with planning in the other air and space power missions. At a point where their expertise is no longer required, the operational planner and Air Force leadership would release the specialist team members to return to previous taskings.

Conceptually, this modular, scalable structure allows the Air Force to add only required expertise to assist operational planners when and if operations require and for only as long as necessary.

Although most expertise should be modular and scalable, CAS coordination should remain permanent for conflicts. Coordinating CAS and the other joint fires assets is an inherent part of Army maneuver operations in the full spectrum of operations from major theater conflict to COIN and IW. Therefore, with the exception of non-combat operations like humanitarian relief, CAS expertise should remain a core competency on the operational planner's capabilities. Ideally, the operational planner is an expert in CAS coordination and planning (operational planner would replace the ALO) and uses the TACPs to execute the mission. There is always the option to have both an ALO and operational planner, but the JFACC should determine if such an arrangement is necessary based on the size and scope of the operation. The size, scope and nature of operation will also have a significant impact on planning.

With COIN and IW operations, Army planning is pushed to lower echelon, and with the operational planner concept, the Air Force should follow suit. This is likely the most challenging aspect of the operational planner structure. To provide maximum airpower effectiveness to the JFC, the JFACC must maintain visibility on the entire theater of operations and exercise centralized control of air and space assets. However, the operational planner must have the ability to coordinate directly with CAOC planners early in the air tasking order process to ensure they have the correct assets with appropriate capabilities to support Army operations and integration. This entails pushing decentralized planning and execution to lower levels enabling operational planners to coordinate and plan directly with the tasked air and space units and better integrate assets into the Army scheme of maneuver beyond typical CAS or ISR operations. Obviously this level of coordination requires training for all Air Force and Army organizations.

For maximum integration and effectiveness, operational planners must train, deploy and execute with their assigned Army organization. As an imbedded member of an Army commander's staff, the operational planner would participate in every aspect of the unit's training and deployment spin-up process. This includes in-garrison training to develop the personal relationships and trust necessary for effective operations in combat or relief efforts. Deployment spin-up training and unit certification at the National Training Centers is equally if not more important for operational planner integration for several reasons. First is to cement processes, credibility and trust with the ground force counterparts. Second is to exercise coordination with Air Force assets and associated command and control mechanisms. With this aspect comes the Air Force's obligation to continue to support Army spin-up and certification training. In this respect, the Air Force continues to improve, but with command and control modifications like the operational planner, joint force effectiveness requires continuous emphasis. The National Training Center's mission is to "provide tough, realistic, joint and combined arms training in multi-national venues across the full spectrum of conflict set in a contemporary operating environment to assist Commanders in developing trained, competent leaders and Soldiers by presenting them with current problem sets to improve the force and prepare for success in the Global War on Terrorism and future joint battlefields."<sup>32</sup> The operational planner's task is to be an integral part of this training concept to ensure Army field commanders have a full grasp of air and space power capabilities to create the most capable joint and coalition force. To make the operational planners, and thereby the ground force's training most effective, the Air Force should establish CAOC and TACS processes to exercise every aspect of integration. Similarly, the Army must ensure air and space power is fully integrated into spin-up and certification training

and allowed to exercise to its fullest capability. This includes providing credit for results as well as feedback for less than optimum integration and execution.

One final and important aspect of the operational planner concept is officer career development and promotions. Traditionally, ALO jobs are not highly sought after and are not necessarily the most rewarded jobs in the Air Force. Unfortunately, the operational planner career field is potentially subject to the same status. This is an issue the Air Force, as a service, must remedy. Joint warfighters “in the trenches” executing the mission and making the United States military an even more dominant force is the highest accolade possible and should be held in such esteem. Ensuring promotions, giving joint credit, selecting our most qualified officers and emphasizing the importance of contributing to joint warfighting and coalition operations is essential for success with the operational planner concept. If we as an Air Force fail in this endeavor, the operational planner will become nothing more than an additional and unnecessary step in the command and control process. If we do not send our most qualified Airmen we will lose the confidence of our Army brethren and ultimately create additional manpower and training requirements with no value added. Instituted correctly, the operational planner can have a significant and valuable impact on joint and coalition warfare.

### **Conclusion**

Since its inception, Air Force leadership sought to develop the world’s most dominant airpower fighting force, and with it an extremely flexible and effective command and control structure. In an effort to maximize airpower’s capabilities across the entire gamut of theater operations those leaders designed doctrine and employment philosophies strongly entrenched in centralized control and decentralized execution. These very concepts enabled effective air and

space power prioritization and unleashed devastating effects on enemy force at the strategic, operational and tactical levels of warfare simultaneously.

To turn command and control doctrine into executable reality the Air Force designed the TACS. This system enabled joint air-to-ground integration at every level within our ground forces, and in particular the United States Army. Unfortunately, the United States is a victim of our own success. Because of our overwhelming combat capability, few adversaries, now or in the future, will engage the United States in force-on-force conventional warfare. The Global War on Terrorism and operations in Iraq and Afghanistan provide the most current and relevant examples of how future adversaries are likely to engage our military. This does not mean we abandon our conventional employment methods designed for major theater conflict, but we must adjust our employment methodologies to include a broader spectrum of warfare. As a result, the Air Force should develop operational planning airpower experts and modular, scalable planning teams capable of operational level planning across the full spectrum of Air Force capabilities and integrate those personnel and teams into Army divisions, brigades and battalions to maximize joint air, ground and space operations and effectiveness.

Improving airpower integration with Army organizations will require a more robust planning capability in those units. This capability should come from an operational planner concept with highly trained and motivated Air Force officers integrated at the appropriate echelons within the Army. Although we currently integrate ALOs, the operational planner requires a much broader educational background in all aspects of air and space power capabilities and full understanding of both the Air Force and Army planning processes. Regardless of the amount of education and training provided, the nature of some conflicts will be beyond the ability or capacity for a single planner, necessitating specialized expertise. In such



cases, the Air Force can and should develop modular, scalable teams of such experts to augment the operational planner, further enhancing air, space and ground integration and synergizing combat capability.

For the operational planner concept to function at its fullest capability, Air Force leaders would need to push planning to lower echelons as conflict moves toward IW and COIN areas on the warfare spectrum. As a result, to fully integrate into the Army scheme of maneuver, operational planners must have the authority to plan and coordinate air and space assets into the ground battle. The JFACC would not forgo centralized control of airpower, but rather push detailed planning to lower echelons.

The United States military must not redesign proven employment methods strictly based on current COIN/IW operations. We must, however, recognize the spectrum of warfare will continue to favor unconventional operations and adjust our training and employment methods accordingly. If we do, we will remain be the most dominant military force for many years to come.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine*, 17 November 2003, ix.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>4</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2, *Operations and Organization*, 3 April 2007, 69.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid, 70.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 69.
- <sup>7</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-1.3, *Counterland Operations*, 11 September 2006, 55.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, 61.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, 62.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, 56.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 55.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 52.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, 56.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid, 63.
- <sup>15</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document (AFDD) 2-3, *Irregular Warfare*, 1 August 2007, vi.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, 67.
- <sup>17</sup> Office of Air Force Lessons Learned (HQ USAF/A9L), *Integration of Airpower in Operational Level Planning Report*, 22 August 2008, iv.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, 6.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid, 6.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, 6.
- <sup>21</sup> Maj Gen William J. Rew, *Operational Flexibility Briefing*, 25 November 2008.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> Lt Col Keith Teister, “Developing More Capable ALO Networks,” *Air Land Sea Bulletin* Issue No. 2008-3, September 2008, 21.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, 21.
- <sup>26</sup> Office of Air Force Lessons Learned (HQ USAF/A9L), *Integration of Airpower in Operational Level Planning Report*, 22 August 2008, 5.
- <sup>27</sup> Richard B. Andres, Jeffrey B. Hukill, “Anaconda, A Flawed Joint Planning Process,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 47, 4th Quarter 2007, 137.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 137.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 139.
- <sup>30</sup> Lt Col Troy Orwan, interviewed by author, 15 August 2008.
- <sup>31</sup> Similar concept proposed by Maj Gen William J. Rew, *Operational Flexibility Briefing*, 25 November 2008.
- <sup>32</sup> United States Army National Training Center homepage, <http://www.irwin.army.mil/channels>.

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